Chapter 98: Retribution

DENKEN.
...OH, SORRY.
IT SEEMS I FELL ASLEEP.
THAT BADGE...
YOU GOT PROMOTED AGAIN.
CONGRATULATIONS.
YES. THIS MEANS I'LL RECEIVE A HANDSOME BONUS.
A TREMENDOUS AMOUNT OF MONEY. IT'S MORE THAN ENOUGH FOR FRONTIER NOBILITY LIKE US.
ENOUGH THAT YOU WON'T HAVE TO DIE—
WHAT'S WRONG?
I SEE. THIS IS A DREAM.
I CAN SO CLEARLY REMEMBER THE DAY LONG AGO WHEN I RECEIVED THIS BADGE.
I FELT LIKE ALL MY EFFORTS HAD PAID OFF.
I WAS PLANNING TO RETURN TO WEISE BY CARRIAGE EARLY THE NEXT MORNING.
BUT ON THE NIGHT OF THE AWARD CEREMONY, A MESSENGER ARRIVED TO INFORM ME OF YOUR DEATH.
LEKTÜRE.
I MISSED MY CHANCE TO SEE YOU.
IT WASN'T FOR THE MONEY THAT I'D WORKED SO HARD...
...OR EVEN FOR THIS TRINKET.
STILL, EVEN IF THIS IS JUST A DREAM...
...I AM SO HAPPY TO SEE YOU ONE LAST TIME.
ONE LAST TIME?
MACHT HAS BEATEN ME.
HE'S MADE OUR DIFFERENCE IN STRENGTH VERY CLEAR.
I DEVOTED MYSELF TO MY TRAINING, NEVER NEGLECTING IT EVEN ONCE IN THE LAST 50 YEARS.
AND YET I COULDN'T REACH HIS LEVEL.
SO WHAT?
YOU'VE LOST COUNTLESS TIMES BEFORE.
BUT YOU'VE NEVER GIVEN UP.
THOSE WERE MERELY SPARRING MATCHES.
DIDN'T YOU SAY YOU WOULD CONTINUE YOUR CLUMSY STRUGGLE UNTIL THE VERY END?
AT LEAST, THAT'S WHAT THE DENKEN I KNOW WOULD DO.
COME TO THINK OF IT...
...THERE WAS JUST ONE TIME...
FRIEREN...
HOW MANY YEARS HAVE PASSED?
WHO KNOWS? IT'S BEEN AN HOUR OR SO.
DAMN IT.
I WONDER WHEN I STARTED CHOOSING MY WORDS SO CAREFULLY, PUTTING UP A FACADE, AND ACTING ALL HIGH AND MIGHTY.
I FEEL LIKE A FOOL FOR TRYING TO SHOW OFF ALL THE TIME.
"DAMN IT"?
IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME.
WHAT IS THIS, BY THE WAY?
IT'S A PROTECTION SPELL.
NOW DIAGOLDZE WON'T WORK ON US.
ASTONISHING.
I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU REALLY FOUND A WAY TO COUNTER IT.
BUT THINGS AREN'T LOOKING SO GOOD FOR US.
I WAS LUCKY TO FIND YOU, BUT I HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO DO MUCH OTHER THAN RESTORE YOU.
I SEE.
THEY'VE ALREADY FIGURED OUT OUR LOCATION TOO.
IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE I'VE FACED EXPERIENCED ENEMIES WHO COULD FIND ME WHEN I'M CONCEALED.
I STILL CANNOT BELIEVE MY EYES.
HOWEVER, FRIEREN, NOW THAT YOU HAVE SUCCESSFULLY DISPELLED DIAGOLDZE...
...I CANNOT ALLOW YOU TO ESCAPE.
AS IF YOU EVER INTENDED ANYTHING ELSE.
NICE TO MEET YOU, FRIEREN.
UH-HUH.
DON'T CARE. DIDN'T ASK.
THE GREATER DEMON WHO APPEARED IN MACHT'S MEMORIES.
I CAN TELL SHE'S POWERFUL.
I'D GUESS SHE'S ON THE SAME LEVEL AS MACHT.
ALLOW ME TO INTRODUCE MYSELF.
I AM SOLITÄR, A GREATER DEMON.
WOULD YOU LIKE TO HAVE A LITTLE CHAT WITH ME?
THERE'S NOTHING FOR US TO TALK ABOUT.
FRIEREN...
YOU'LL GET TO LIVE THAT MUCH LONGER.
LUCKY ME.
I COULD CRY FROM HOW GRATEFUL I AM FOR YOUR MERCY.
YOU DO REALIZE THAT THE ODDS ARE AGAINST YOU, DON'T YOU?
IT LOOKS LIKE YOU'VE MASTERED A WAY TO COUNTER DIAGOLDZE.
IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE THAT YOU ACHIEVED THAT IN JUST TWO MONTHS.
IT DIDN'T TAKE TWO MONTHS TO ANALYZE THE MAGIC.
I FIRST EXPERIENCED DIAGOLDZE WHEN I FOUGHT YOU 600 YEARS AGO, MACHT.
I DON'T RECALL.
I DIDN'T EXPECT YOU TO.
I'M JUST ONE OF MANY MAGES WHO HAVE FOUGHT YOU AND ESCAPED.
IT'S NO SURPRISE THAT YOU DON'T REMEMBER ME.
YOU GAVE ME A HARD TIME BACK THEN.
IT TOOK ME A WHOLE CENTURY JUST TO RESTORE MY RIGHT ARM AFTER YOU TURNED IT INTO GOLD.
I WAS CONFIDENT THAT I COULD RESTORE MY BODY BECAUSE I'D DONE IT BEFORE.
I KNEW IT'D TAKE A LONG TIME, THOUGH.
SO THAT'S WHY YOU TRIED TO PICK A FIGHT WITH ME.
YOU'RE MAD.
YOU HAD NO GUARANTEE THAT YOU'D BE ABLE TO RETURN YOUR ENTIRE BODY TO ITS ORIGINAL STATE.
TO IMPROVE THE PRECISION OF MY NEGATION SPELL...
...I WANTED TO SEE YOU CAST DIAGOLDZE.
HONESTLY, IT WAS A GAMBLE.
BUT YOU DIDN'T TAKE THE BAIT.
YOU WERE WARY OF ME.
THAT WAS UNEXPECTED.
IF YOU TRULY BELIEVED THAT DIAGOLDZE WAS A FLAWLESS SPELL...
...YOU WOULDN'T HAVE ACTED THE WAY YOU DID.
NOW THAT I THINK ABOUT IT, YOU MUST HAVE TAKEN PRECAUTIONS AGAINST A CURSE REVERSAL LIKE SERIE'S MISTILZIELA SPELL.
BUT THAT WAS ENOUGH INFORMATION FOR ME.
DIAGOLDZE IS NOT PERFECT.
MAGIC IS ALL ABOUT VISUALIZATION.
IT WAS POSSIBLE FOR ME TO COMPLETE MY NEGATION SPELL BY CONSTRUCTING THEORIES USING PIECES OF YOUR MEMORIES.
NOW I CAN EVEN RETURN THIS GOLDEN LAND BACK TO NORMAL.
I NEED TO ANALYZE THE GOLDEN LAND ITSELF TO SOME EXTENT...
...SO I CAN'T DO IT RIGHT AWAY.
VSH
I'VE TOLD YOU WHAT YOU WANTED TO HEAR, RIGHT?
SHALL WE GET THIS BATTLE STARTED?
ARE YOU SERIOUS?
EVEN IF YOU ARE PREPARED TO DEAL WITH DIAGOLDZE...
...YOU'RE STILL FIGHTING AGAINST TWO GREATER DEMONS.
I'M NOT SAYING IT'S POSSIBLE...
...BUT DON'T YOU THINK YOUR BEST OPTION WOULD BE TO RETREAT FOR NOW?
I'D LOVE TO.
BUT IT'S TOO RISKY TO IGNORE MACHT OF THE GOLDEN LAND...
...THE ENEMY OF ALL HUMANITY, AND LET HIM ESCAPE.
"THE ENEMY OF ALL HUMANITY"?
WHAT A HORRIBLE THING TO SAY.
YOU'VE READ HIS MEMORIES, HAVEN'T YOU?
HE WISHES FROM THE BOTTOM OF HIS HEART TO COEXIST WITH HUMANS.
UNLIKE ME AND THE OTHER DEMONS.
THNK
SH
GOOD REFLEXES.
DIDN'T THINK YOU COULD DODGE THAT.
VWSH
THAT'S TRUE.
MACHT, THE FACT THAT YOU DESIRE TO COEXIST WITH HUMANS...
...MAKES YOU DIFFERENT FROM OTHER CRUEL DEMONS.
I RESPECT YOU FOR THAT.
AS FAR AS I KNOW...
...YOU'RE ONLY THE SECOND DEMON WHO'S MADE AN EFFORT TO MEET HUMANS HALFWAY.
THAT...
...IS WHY WE CAN NEVER UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER.
THE MORE YOU WISH TO COEXIST...
...THE MORE PEOPLE DIE BY YOUR HANDS.
WHAT IS THE PROBLEM WITH THAT?
IF I CAN UNDERSTAND HUMANITY, ONE DAY THE PATH TO COEXISTENCE—
RIGHT.
HOW MANY MORE PEOPLE DO YOU NEED TO KILL TO ACHIEVE THAT?
LIKE YOU, THE DEMON KING WISHED FOR COEXISTENCE WITH HUMANS.
AND THAT LED HIM TO DESTROY MANY NATIONS AND THEIR PEOPLES, TO THE POINT THAT HUMANITY WAS REDUCED TO ONE-THIRD OF ITS POPULATION IN ITS HEYDAY.
MACHT.
YOUR DESIRE TO COEXIST WITH HUMANITY WILL LEAD TO ITS EXTINCTION.
BUT WE AREN'T SO NICE THAT WE'LL JUST WAIT FOR THAT TO HAPPEN.
IT'S TIME FOR YOU TO FACE RETRIBUTION...
...MACHT OF THE GOLDEN LAND.
"RETRIBUTION," YOU SAY?
YOU'LL FACE RETRIBUTION ONE DAY, NO MATTER WHAT.
JUST LIKE I AM RIGHT NOW.
SO I WILL BE PUNISHED AS A VILLAIN, THEN?
THERE IS NO GREATER HONOR THAN THAT.
NOW, SHOW ME, FRIEREN.
I FEEL LIKE I'M CLOSE TO DISCOVERING SOMETHING.
FRIEREN.
PLEASE. LEAVE THIS TO ME.
CAN YOU WIN?
I SEE.
IN THAT CASE, I WILL CRUSH SOLITÄR.
WONDERFUL.

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